

# MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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Photo: Mike Kenney

## Winding Down and Winding Up

BY JEN REITER

As the calendar year starts to wind down, the excitement for mushing season starts to rev up! It's so hard for my students living in Baltimore to imagine there are places in Alaska and elsewhere with snow already on the ground, but every picture we see of a team training starts us dreaming of our own snow days!

A few years ago, Erin Montgomery shared with me an idea to have kids track the Iditarod qualifiers and other early races as a way to start rewinding up for Iditarod excitement. I asked her for a picture of her board to share with you, and she did one better.... she made a digital version you can share with your students! Check it out here: [Editable Google Version](#) or [PDF](#) In my room, we record the names using red for mushers who are also running the Iditarod. It's a great way to start to get kids familiar with some of the names of the sport and get some strategy in for choosing their own musher to track.

I'm most excited to share with you this month the launch of our newly revised Educational Trail Mail Project! We are currently hosting an art contest for middle and high school students to design the mail cachet that will be carried down the trail by the mushers (page 5). And, read on in this newsletter to learn how your class can send something along the trail in the musher's sled in one of those cachets (page 11)! It's sure to be a thrill for you and your students!



# Updates from the EDU Trail

Checking in with our EDU Team to see what you can expect this month:

## A Sneak Peek at the Upcoming December Teacher on the Trail Posts

Jim Deprez,  
2021 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail

As the weather continues changing, the holiday season comes to the front of everyone's mind. For many of us, that means swapping the fall clothes for our winter gear, and getting ready to play in the snow with our kids during the holiday break. Therefore, this month I will be asking some mushers about their most important piece of clothing, and take a close look at how it has changed over the years. The "Classroom Connection" post will be geared towards the art teachers out there. It is a lesson that can also be adapted to be taught virtually, to help students learn to draw a husky. Lastly, with the passing of 2020, the misconception that I will be examining is the rule of passing! Passing an opponent in this sport is unlike any other. Take a look at this post on the 20th to learn how it works.

### Moments With Mushers: Clothing

Every musher has their own preferences. When it comes to clothing they take with them on the trail, it is no different. So I asked some of them what their most important piece of clothing is, and how it has changed over the years. As technology constantly improves, and new materials are introduced, the clothing that the mushers wear during the race changes too. Some mushers have donned more of the traditional clothing first used by Alaska Natives and others have gone for the latest technologies. Either way, the development has come a long way! Check out some of the responses given by mushers as to their most important piece of clothing and how it has evolved.



This photo is of Eep Anderson's boots and Jim's boots. Many mushers wear the same boots on the trail today.

Photo: Terrie Hanke

### Classroom Connections: Husky Drawing in Art Class - Virtual Lesson Possibility

At least around me, schools and school districts seem to be headed towards remote learning, e-learning, virtual school or whatever term your community is using. For this reason, I want to supply teachers with a fun activity that can be adapted to be done virtually! One of the art teachers in my district and I collaborated to find a project that the students could do in the art classroom to go along with our Iditarod unit. Students will learn how to draw a husky, and add a background depicting the Alaskan night sky. It is a fun lesson that looks really impressive when finished.



Photo: Robin Hersha

### Misconceptions and More: Passing

When we think about passing in a race, we typically think about two competitors racing side-by-side, vying for position to get ahead of the other one. In the Iditarod this is not the case however! In fact there is a rule in the Iditarod rule book addressing how mushers must pass each other on the trail. I love the way the ITC has set up this rule, as it speaks again to the sportsmanship of the competitors during the heat of the race. Come back on the 20th to learn about the history of this rule, and what it looks like out on the trail!



Photo: Terrie Hanke

## Where Am I?

by: Sled Dog Ed

Dear Teachers,

A new school year has begun to unfold and another Iditarod Sled Dog Race is on the horizon for 2021. I, Sled Dog Ed, have been busy searching for new ways to connect the race, history, places and events for you and your students. This past year has been challenging with our world living in a pandemic, but as we sled dogs say, "Mush on!" We have a job to do... so let's continue moving forward and adjusting to the new trail and any obstacles it may pose.

Where am I? I often ask this of myself as my nose leads me astray while romping and running in the fields near my kennel. If only I could attach a GPS to my collar that beeps and announces the following coordinates, 44.8146° N, 91.4927° W, I would always be able to get back to my "kennel sweet kennel". Musher's have GPS devices attached to their sleds for the purpose of locating them should an emergency arise. GPS stands for Global Positioning System which makes use of the geographical lines of latitude and longitude to provide coordinates for a person's location or a place of interest.

Students of all ages are usually motivated to learn about new places and the historical nature associated with them. I have developed an activity for students that will use geographic coordinates to identify famous places and their significance relating to Alaska or the Iditarod Sled Dog Race. Students can also research any special events that are associated with each location. Accommodations can be made with this activity from using actual in-class resources to virtual resources depending upon your current teaching situation.

I have come up with ten sets of geographic coordinates for your students to research. Have them identify the name of the place and its significance and/or a special event that takes place there. Of course, you may have your students come up with more coordinates or switch the process entirely. Encourage students to look for the place and then identify its matching coordinates. Numerous options abound!

Attached for your students is the worksheet of ten [\*\*Iditarod Geographic Coordinates\*\*](#) and for your reference, the [\*\*Iditarod Geographic Coordinates -Answer Sheet\*\*](#).

Have fun exploring!  
~Sled Dog Ed

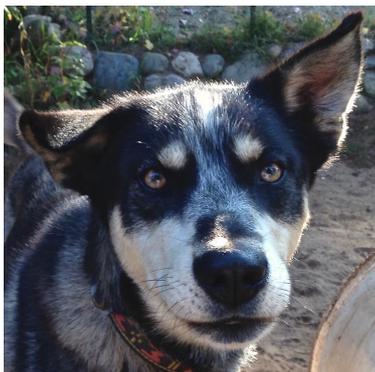


Photo: Terrie Hanke



Laura Neese at her Kennel in Michigan  
Photo: Terrie Hanke

# Husky Talk

by: Erin Montgomery



## Upcoming episodes: Laura Neese and Martin Buser

A popular story in the 2020 Iditarod was the illustrious group, "The Elim 11." This season we will be having a series of episodes talking with members of the Elim 11. A group of 11 mushers, traveling together, came across poor trail conditions and bad weather. All 11 mushers headed back to the checkpoint of Elim and waited the weather and trail conditions out. After hunkering down in Elim for a couple of days, the group worked together to get to White Mountain where they all had to take their 8-hour mandatory rest. Once their rest was finished, they headed to the finish in Nome.

Our first episode in this series will feature Iditarod and Yukon Quest veteran, Laura Neese. Laura has been on our show previously. Listen to her previous episodes here: [Ed Stielstra and Laura Neese \(Episode #15\)](#) and [Laura Neese \(Season 3 Episode 4\)](#). We are excited to have Laura back on the show to talk with her about her experience on the trail last year, especially her adventure with the Elim 11.

Our second episode in the Elim 11 series will be with 4-time Iditarod champion, Martin Buser. The students will be talking with Martin on his perspective of the experience the mushers went through.



Get your students ready for our Elim 11 series by having them complete the [Elim 11 Hyperslide Activity](#) or [PDF](#). Students will be able to explore articles and videos to learn about this group. They will also learn more about Laura and Martin.

If your class wants to be featured on Husky Talk, follow our Iditarod EDU Facebook page to see who future podcasts will be with. Your students can email us at [huskytalk1@gmail.com](mailto:huskytalk1@gmail.com) and ask a question they would like us to ask our guest. We will ask their question and say their name. You can also email us if you would like to hear a certain guest on our show. Elim 11

## Attention Middle and High School Teachers: We have a special art contest just for your students!

We are thrilled to announce a student art contest to create this year's Trail Mail judged by artists Jon and Jona Van Zyle.

What is Trail Mail?

To honor the Historic Iditarod Trail's use as a mail trail, each musher will carry a cachet of mail down the trail as a part of our revamped Educational Trail Mail project.

What is the Educational Trail Mail Project?

The Educational Trail Mail project will give classrooms the chance to send a piece of mail in a musher's sled during this year's race.

What are the Trail Mail Art Contest details?

1. We are looking for student artwork to print on the envelopes that will carry the Educational Trail Mail down the trail. The theme for the artwork this year is "Connecting Sled Dogs to History."
2. Any visual medium is acceptable. A clear, high res scan or photo of the artwork will need to be submitted along with the student's name and age, and the teacher or parent contact information.
3. Artwork will be printed on the left side of each envelope.
4. Entries will be narrowed down to 6-10 finalists by Iditarod EDU staff. The winning piece of art and two runner ups will be chosen by Jon and Jona Van Zyle.
5. The winner will receive a prize package featuring a copy of the official Trail Mail that has traveled down the trail, a 2021 Iditarod T-shirt, a Race Guide, and other treats.
6. The three finalists will have their designs published in the 2021 Race Guide. They may also be requested to send the originals of their work to Alaska to be displayed at Iditarod events.

Deadline for Submissions: December 15, 2020

Email Submissions or Questions to: [trailmail@iditarod.com](mailto:trailmail@iditarod.com)

# Teaching with the Insider

by: Jane Holmes

## Summary:

This month's video segments have no embedded narration. They showcase people, animals, trail experiences, and the majestic landscape through which the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race runs. Use them for many types of writing and publishing.

["Beauty of the Checkpoint"](#) - March 17, 2020 12:50am

["Time-lapse of the Hustle & Bustle Leaving Takotna"](#) - March 12, 2020 2:49am

["Moose On The Loose - Happy River"](#) - March 9, 2020 1:37pm

["RUN DOG RUN RAINY PASS"](#) - March 11, 2020 10:28am

["Let it Snow in Galena"](#) - March 14, 2020 2:14pm

["The Beauty of Rainy Pass"](#) - March 10, 2020 1:07am

["Flying Through the Alaska Range"](#) - March 9, 2020 8:20pm

["Sunset - Nikolai"](#) - March 9, 2020 10:09pm

## Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

## Technology Integration:

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6

Consider having students use some of these tools for publishing:

Prezi, Google Slides, PowToons, Flipgrid, StoryboardThat, Animoto, Stop Motion Studio

Here are some collaboration tools students can use:

Padlet, Wakelet, Mentimeter, Flipgrid

Insider video clips included in lessons in this newsletter are provided for free use during the month of the newsletter only. If you are interested in becoming an Insider subscriber, visit this page: [Insider](#)

[Subscription Information](#)

# Primary Source of the Month

Jen Reiter

December ushers in holiday seasons for people all around the world. And with holiday seasons comes the big rush to the post office to mail holiday cards and packages. Do your students ever wonder how letters and packages were delivered before the creation of airplanes? Well, for many in the northern regions, mail was delivered by dog team. In fact, one of the historic mail routes traveled along the Iditarod Trail. From the very early stages of planning and creating the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, Joe Redington, Sr. wanted to pay homage to that part of the trail's history, and so the plan to have mushers carry mail down the trail came to be. This primary source lesson will have your students discover that piece of Iditarod history while looking at several artifacts to think like historians and try to figure out the connection between them all!



## Using the Source With Students

1. Display the object for your students and have them share what they See, Think, and Wonder about the artifact.
2. If you have more time to spend with this topic, the full lesson plan, which uses artifacts such as a mail sled in the Smithsonian collection, Iditarod race cachets, postage stamps, and primary and secondary source writing, is available [HERE](#). The lesson challenges the students to put the pieces together to figure out how they are all related and to eventually come to the conclusion that the modern mushers carry mail down the trail to commemorate one historic use of the trail.
3. After learning about the history of the Iditarod Trail as a mail trail, students can design their own envelope artwork to commemorate that history. Don't forget, students in middle and high school are invited to enter our contest to design the 2021 Educational Trail Mail Project!
4. Check page 11 in this newsletter for information on how your class can send a piece of mail down the Iditarod Trail with a musher in the 2021 race!

## Associated Resources:

- Article from the Smithsonian about race cachets: [Click Here](#)
- Sticking with the mail theme, students may enjoy sending letters to mushers: [Details Here](#)
- Good resource on the history of the trail, including mail delivery: [Click Here](#)
- Good guide that features a super map and some historic photos of mail delivery on the trail: [Here](#)
- The John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon Race, an Iditarod qualifier, is run to honor an Anishinabe mail carrier in Minnesota. Learn about him [HERE](#).
- Alaska mail sled at the Smithsonian Postal Museum: [Click Here](#)
- Additional historic photos: [Click Here](#)

# Virtual Trail Journal - Southern Route

Article and Photos by: Terrie Hanke

With "VIRTUAL" being the new buzzword these days in education, Canine Reporter, Sanka, has come up with the idea of a virtual trail journey. The Virtual Trail Journey will be a resource for teachers and students that will provide information about the checkpoints, the people who run the checkpoints, the trail between the checkpoints, the people who live in the villages that host checkpoints along with pronunciations and quick facts. You know the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words? There will be pictures in each story to provide a visual sense of the trail and checkpoints. Each checkpoint will have its own Virtual Trail Journey story written by Sanka W. Dog. Stories about Yentna Station, Skwentna, Finger Lake, Rainy Pass, Rohn, Nikolai and McGrath already exist in Sanka's K9 Journalist section on the EDU webpage. A couple of checkpoints will be added each week so check back often to learn more about the trail, the traditions and the people who make each checkpoint unique and special. Get a feeling for what Takotna is like and why it's the place many mushers choose to take the required 24-hour layover in this Virtual Trail Journey story.

## Virtual Trail Journey – Takotna at Mile 329

By Sanka W. Dog

The trail used by the Iditarod that runs from McGrath to Takotna (tuh-KOTT-nuh) is a well-traveled snowmachine route. Teams cover the 18-mile distance in two to three hours. At night or on cold days, the route is generally fast but on warm days, it can be a slow run. Most of the 18 miles runs either on or along the Kuskokwim and Takotna Rivers.



Takotna, as a checkpoint, is known for its hospitality and has been called the "friendliest little checkpoint on the Iditarod Trail." The checkpoint is located in the community center that overlooks the Takotna River. The food is plentiful and delicious. Every musher is treated to delicious food often complimented by fresh fruit and lettuce salad. For dessert there is an abundant choice of fresh baked pies. It's no wonder that mushers like to take their 24-hour rest in Takotna - delicious food and friendly folks. Takotna is a lot quieter than other checkpoints as there isn't lodging for reporters and spectators.

The village has 23 residents. It's a big deal when Iditarod comes through. It's a great deal of work to organize and coordinate a checkpoint let alone feed hungry mushers and race volunteers. Every man, woman and child residing in Takotna has a job during Iditarod. The school shuts down and the kids all have duties. Relatives and friends of Takotna residents from all over the United States migrate to the checkpoint during March to help with the race. Some cook, others park dog teams and heat water while the kids clean up. Hospitality is provided 24/7 until the last musher leaves the checkpoint.

Synonymous with Takotna is pie and Jan Newton was the organizer and driving force for both for many years. Jan has passed on but she established a standard that continues today in Takotna. It was her goal to make everyone feel special and feel at home. She emphasized that what was done for one musher is done for all. If a musher has taken the long rest at McGrath and intends to pass through Takotna, don't worry. There'll be a sack lunch ready to take along on the trail. No one leaves Takotna without food.

Pie makers begin producing double-crust fruit pies several weeks before the race then freeze them to bake as needed. The crème pies are produced daily during the race. Take your pick – blueberry, cherry, peach, apple, pumpkin, banana cream, coconut cream, butterscotch, lemon meringue and pecan, they are all to die for. On route over Takotna, Iditarod Air Force pilots often land briefly to pick up a pie and bring it to another checkpoint on the trail. By the time the last musher departs Takotna, 75 – 80 pies are a delicious memory.



Jan always tried to provide every musher with what they wanted. All one had to do was ask and if she had the ingredients, it'd be served up shortly. Years back musher Sonny King commented on all the delicious pie Jan had made and then asked why she didn't make his favorite – pecan. The answer was short and to the point – we don't have pecans. Sonny took care of that by sending a case of pecans to Jan from his home state of South Carolina. When he walked into the checkpoint the next winter, Jan handed him a fork and his very own pecan pie. He ate every bit of it. Five-time Iditarod Champion Rick Swenson preferred coconut banana crème. Jan always had one ready for him.

Takotna is known for its cold winters and cool summers. Temperatures range from -42°F to 25°F in the winter and between 25 and 70°F in the summer. Precipitation would be very similar to McGrath with 10 inches of rainfall including around 7 feet of snow. The river is frozen from November through May. The community has electricity. The school and community center have running water and flush toilets. Water is hauled from the waterworks for home use and honey buckets and outhouses are used for sewage disposal. Travelers come and go from the village by either plane or boat. The local road system covers about 15 miles including a road that climbs to the old airstrip located high above the village. Recently a new airstrip was built closer to the village.

The population of the community is mixed including indigenous Alaskans as well as Caucasian and Hispanics. Some residents have jobs with the school district, post office, health clinic or local businesses like the small grocery store or seasonal construction companies. A great majority of the area residents rely on moose, salmon, gardens and wild berry crops as food sources. Take a close look at this picture of the inside of the checkpoint. What items do you see that also appear on your table at home? Think about it - this tiny village in the interior bush of Alaska - accessible only by plane or boat - they hunt and fish for most of their meat - yet we have so many common condiments on our tables



Now for a little history that Handler and I learned from the Alaska Community Data Base. Over the years, Takotna has been known as Berry Landing, Portage City, Takotna City, Takotna Station and Tocotna. In 1908 after gold was discovered in the Innoko District, Arthur Berry was hired to bring supplies up the river. The village was founded at the spot where the river became too shallow for Berry's sternwheeler to continue. The village prospered during the gold rush having several commercial companies and roadhouses as well as a post office, radio station and newspaper. The water level changed from year to year and so it was not always possible to get supplies to Takotna thus a landing was established further down river. Later in the 1930's mining activity declined, the Alaska Commercial Company closed the store and McGrath became the supply hub for the area.

Well, there you have it - Takotna, the friendliest little checkpoint on the Iditarod Trail. Our friend and Iditarod Champion, Joe Runyan considers Takotna an excellent choice for the 24-hour layover saying, "It's a quiet spot for mushers to rest inside a warm dry building, dry out wet gear, eat delicious food and gather information about trail conditions and weather." Next Handler will tell us about Ophir Checkpoint. Stay tuned for that story and remember, in everything do your best everyday and have a plan.

Born to Run,  
Sanka



Photo: Kelly Villar

# If You "Mush" Know...

## Meet Our Q&A Expert:

**Lynne Witte**  
**Iskristall Kennel**  
**Michigan**

Lynne's classroom teaching began in 1976. For 40 years she was a primary classroom teacher and coached middle school cross country and track. During those years she was a competitive marathon canoe racer and part of the United States Canoe Association as board member and delegate. She continues to be an active marathon canoe racer and part of Michigan's canoe racing leadership.

In 2000, her passion for teaching and dog sledding merged. She was able to travel to Alaska for the Iditarod. Under Cheryl Cheadle- Metiva's mentorship, she was able to take a leave from her classroom to experience the Iditarod as a volunteer, experience checkpoints, and be in Nome for the finish. She was able to share this experience daily with her classroom back in Michigan.

Beginning in 2004, she had her own sled dog and started skijoring. She then continued adding dogs to skijor and finally to train and run teams on sleds with mushers in Michigan.

In 2016, she retired from classroom teaching to pursue her passion to train and race sled dog teams. She was privileged to train some yearling teams with her four dogs as her leaders. In 2017, she ran a yearling team in the Yukon Quest 300.

She has continued to train and build a small Alaskan husky team to compete in mid distance races in the midwest. She has competed in the Beargrease, CopperDog, Midnight Run, and Tahquamenon races. Like classroom teaching, she is a student of mushing and a teacher for her team.



Lynne Witte  
Photo: Sid Johnson

## This Month's Question:

### How do you decide which dog goes where in a team? Can they change places?

The sled dogs make a team. A team includes the leaders, the team dogs, and the wheel dogs.

Like a coach of a team like soccer or basketball, I as the musher want to know my dogs and what they may be best suited for on the team. During training and free running, I can observe which dogs like to run fast and are listening to my directions for the role as a leader. I like to try all of my dogs as leaders. It is good to know you can switch the dogs around to lead to give them a break if needed when leading.

All of the dogs get the opportunity to be team dogs. Some dogs, like students, have a preference for a play friend but it is good that all of the team members can get along.

The wheel dogs are often the strongest or biggest on my team. I like to be able to rotate my dogs into different positions and with different training partners so they learn to get along with each other.

On race day, I will make my team positions in best pairings for the conditions. On a snowy whiteout race day, I will choose my leader who is the most confident to lead in those conditions. If it is a hard paced fast trail, I would choose my fastest leader. Even during a race, I will rotate positions if it seems we need a different partner or leader.



# Send a Piece of Mail Down the Trail!

Jen Reiter

We are so excited to announce our new Educational Trail Mail Project to you! This is an amazing chance for your class to send a piece of mail down the trail in one of the 2021 student designed cachets, and help us raise funds for our education programs at the same time!

It's very simple for your class to participate:

1. Head over to this [LINK](#) to purchase your spot on a sled for just \$5.
2. Once your purchase is complete, you will be emailed further directions about how to send your piece of mail to be included. Basically, you will be sending one 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper down the trail. What is on your paper is totally up to you! Your students could write a poem or story, they could create a piece of artwork, they could all include their signatures... Whatever you and your students decide.
3. Once your piece of mail is received by our program coordinator, it will be put into an Educational Trail Mail envelope that will feature this year's winning student art piece.
4. Your now filled cachet will be taken to the Musher Meeting in Anchorage that is held on the Thursday before the race. Your musher will sign the envelope and it will be collected back by our volunteers who will have it postmarked in Anchorage and then packaged for safe travels down the trail.
5. Your mail will next be delivered to your musher at the race restart on Willow Lake and will be packed safely on his or her sled for its journey to Nome.
6. Once it arrives under the Burled Arch, your letter will be postmarked in Nome and put into the mail stream to make its way back to you!

Each musher is limited to carrying Trail Mail from 5 classes, so be sure to take advantage of this opportunity soon! Sales begin on December 2nd and are limited to one piece of mail per class or homeschool family. If you have questions, please email

[trailmail@iditarod.com](mailto:trailmail@iditarod.com)

## Mark Your Calendar

December 2, 2020: Trail Mail Sales Open

December 15, 2020: Deadline for Trail Mail Art Contest Entries

January 15, 2020: End of Trail Mail Sales (could be earlier if sold out)

January 31, 2020: Last Day Trail Mail Can Be Received to go on the Trail

March 6, 2021, 10am: Iditarod Start

March 7, 2021, 2pm: Iditarod ReStart

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